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## **Socialist Studies No.59, Spring 2006**

# **Barriers To Socialism**

## **Nationalism and racism**

Nationalism and racism divide the working class. Nationalism gives the false idea that workers have an interest in the country they live in. They believe it is "*their*" country, and are periodically willing to kill and be killed in its wars.

Nationalism is a false set of ideas and beliefs. And for a number of reasons. The working class do not own trade routes, they do not own the means of production, they do not have spheres of influence to control, and they do not have any raw resources to protect. As Marx pointed out, the working class has no country.

The working class are made up of men and women throughout the world who do not own the means of production. Workers are forced into employment to sell their ability to work for a wage or salary.

Workers share the same class problems of class exploitation no matter where they live in the world. Workers in India, Pakistan and China, for example, have identical class interests to workers in France, the US and Britain. A world working class faces a world capitalist class over the ownership and control of the means of production.

Under capitalism, workers have to compete for jobs, housing, and other necessary goods. It is easy to blame other workers for particular social problems like loss of jobs and poor housing but that is wrong: it only benefits the capitalist class. Immigrants, economic migrants, workers in foreign countries belong to the same exploited class, and all are potential socialists. In fact, workers faced a shortage of housing and hospitals before large scale immigration; these social problems have their root in capitalism and exist all over the world, whether a country loses workers as

emigrants or accepts them as workers.

Racist doctrines have no ground in fact but racist ideas set an insidious trap for the working class. The social problems caused by capitalism are international and can only be solved by all workers, whatever their colour, co-operating, to abolish capitalism and to replace it with Socialism.

## Religion

Religion is an intellectual poison. It is degrading and infantile to worship an abstraction created by men and women to further class control. Religion gives the false impression that there is a better world after death. In reality, workers should be looking to changing society so as to create a better world on earth.

Materialism renders gods as so much myth. You cannot be a Socialist and hold religious ideas. To hold religious ideas is mental slavery. Socialists reject leadership of all kinds, whether they are politicians or priests.

Socialism can only be established by a politically conscious working class. Spiritual leadership is just as debilitating as political leadership.

A Socialist is a person not on their knees to God, Allah, Buddha or Krishna. A Socialist thinks and acts in their own class interest. When workers understand and desire Socialism, they will act in their own interests, and will not need leaders to tell them how to think and what to do - this includes religious leaders.

Religion supports capitalism, as it has supported other property societies. Religion can either offer reaction or reform, but not Socialist revolution. Religion is conservative because it encourages workers, who are oppressed and exploited, to suffer social problems while placing their faith in heaven. This is a confusing doctrine because it diverts workers' attention away from gaining the necessary understanding and knowledge to establish Socialism.

## Reforms

Capitalism can never be reformed in the interests of the working class. Reforms are a constant feature of the problems thrown up by capitalism and the profit system.

However, reforms only deal with the effects of commodity production and exchange for profit, and they turn attention away from the cause: private ownership of the means of production. The failure of reforms can be seen in the long line of social problems that still persist: war, unemployment, environmental pollution, poverty, social alienation, racism, poor housing, and starvation.

Reforms are a barrier to Socialism because those politicians who propose them, offer the working class the idiotic proposition that you can have capitalism without the effects of capitalism. Reforms were once seen as stepping stones to "*socialism*" or as a positive contribution to the working class. Now "*radical*" reforms are designed to sack workers, to cut back on the so-called 'welfare state', to cheapen schooling, and so on.

What of reforms to tackle poverty? Billions are given to charities but to no avail. Political buffoons like Bono, Richard Curtis and Bob Geldof believe governments can be persuaded to write off debt, and stop children dying of hunger and disease. It is naïve wishful thinking.

Politicians exist to administer capitalism, and capitalism dictates that it is profit rather than social need that dictates priorities; national rivalry and national interest, rather than resolving social problems.

Instead of making poverty history under capitalism, which is impossible while the wages system exists, the working class should be making *capitalism* history by establishing Socialism.

## The Capitalist Left

The capitalist left are a barrier to Socialism because they preach the anti-socialist doctrine that workers are too stupid to understand the case for Socialism but can only follow a self-appointed professional elite.

The capitalist left pointed to the Soviet Union as "*already existing Socialism*", excusing the show-trials, the twists and turns of Soviet policy, the appalling conditions workers had to endure, and the lie that this dictatorship was "*Socialism*". For this, the capitalist left should never be forgotten or forgiven.

The capitalist left also confuse workers by misleadingly using the term "*Socialism*" to describe their own capitalist policies. For the capitalist left, "*Socialism*" is either nationalisation or state capitalism, with their leaders acting as dictators telling everyone what to do.

The capitalist left, in their belief that workers cannot understand the case for Socialism, rests on the false premise that the leaders of the various left-wing parties actually understand socialism themselves. They do not. None of the political groups subscribing to the ideas of Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin and Mao have, as their object, the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production by all of society.

If successful, the left could only offer the working class a dictatorship, a police state, political prisons, gulags, the wages system and class exploitation.

## **The Labour Party**

The Labour Party has never been, is not now and never will be a Socialist Party. The Labour Party is a party of capitalism.

The Labour Party has followed the principle of gaining power at any cost; and the cost for the Labour Party, once in power, is to see its social reforms eroded by the reality of capitalism. Cynicism, expediency and corruption have been the legacy of one Labour government after another.

Capitalism has forced upon Labour governments policies that when in opposition they were against: the use of troops to break strikes, nuclear weapons, waging war, and now complicity in Washington's "*extreme rendition*" programmes.

Workers have also seen, with a prolonged period in office, Labour authoritarianism where members of their own party are prevented from returning to Labour's own conference, under the recent Terrorism Act.

The Labour Party is also a barrier to socialism because trade unions erroneously bankroll the party and urge their members to vote at elections for its anti-working class policies, on the baseless grounds that it is the lesser of two evils.

Voting for the Labour Party is a complete waste of the revolutionary use of the vote. Labour can only ever run capitalism *against* the interests of the working class. A vote for Labour is a vote for capitalism and wage slavery.

## **The Working Class**

The principal barrier to Socialism is the working class itself.

In the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO, Marx sketched out the development of the working class, from an incoherent mass through to being able to establish trade unions and a Socialist Party. Yet, for much of the last century, workers have not developed to the point of forming a socialist majority within capitalism.

Workers have the potential to understand that capitalism can never work in their interest, and to take an active role in establishing common ownership and democratic control of the means of production. There is no barrier preventing workers establishing Socialism except for lack of understanding. It is through lack of class consciousness that workers become ensnared in the interests of the capitalist class.

Workers show their political immaturity through their support of nationalism, racism, reform politics, the sirens of the capitalist left, the poison of religion, and support for the Labour Party.

In short, the barriers placed in front of workers, preventing them becoming socialists and establishing socialism, are largely of their own making.

Workers owe allegiance to no country; they have a common interest with workers throughout the world; they have historical experience to show them that reforms cannot solve the problems they face as a class; and they should know by now how necessary it is to avoid political leaders no matter how well meaning.

Clear these barriers, and the establishment of socialism really is a piece of cake.

### THE FRAMEWORK OF LIFE

After 10 years in a North Korean prison camp, Kang (aged 19) was told in 1987 that he and his family were to be released but recalls: *I was actually afraid of leaving that place, of no longer seeing those mountain ridges all around me. Deep down, I had come to love them. They had been the bars of my prison and the framework of my life.* Kang Chol-hwan and Pierre Boulez, THE AQUARIUMS OF PYONGYANG, 2006

Many workers know they could end this prison of poverty and class exploitation but, just as half-starved Kang had come to love that cruel, harsh and deadly prison camp, maybe they too have come to love the bars of their prison-for-life.

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## Fascist Britishness

Gordon Brown, after nine years as Chancellor helping to run British capitalism and wallowing in its wars, while he planned the financing of British militarism including nuclear weapons, has come up with the degenerate idea of a Britishness Day. With more than 4 million of those who have fought for British capitalism since 1939 living in poverty, together with millions of pensioners and single-parent families, perhaps Brown will consider reviving the slogan - "*our slums are the best in the world*".

The empty-headed claptrap that followed his nationalistic announcement made no mention of the fact that the top 10% of the population own the bulk of its wealth, including the means of production. This leaves 90% as wage-slaves - hired and fired to produce wealth owned by a minority. We would hardly expect CHANNEL 4 NEWS to mention the prevailing class system. For so long as workers are willing to be duped and wave their masters' flags, it will remain a case of "*our flag, their country*".

Every fascist dictatorship in history has intensified flag-waving nationalism and pandered to the rabble that sustained it - Nazi Germany being an obvious example. But the mentality of "*us and them*" and "*my country, right or wrong*" is just as vicious and ignorant whether expressed in America, Israel, France or the UK.

Talk about "*reclaiming the flag*" from the extreme right is nonsense. The only way for nationalist flag-wavers (like the Labour Government) is to become part of the extreme right. Leftism and Rightism are in any case just another of those bourgeois distinctions without a difference. Blair's regime is commonly accepted as an example of right-wing Toryism but he remains the leader and idol of the muddle-headed Labour Party, which regards itself as Leftist - maybe to the left of Genghis Khan, anyway.

Currently, Britishness includes being allowed to die in oil-wars but having your name read out at the Cenotaph invites a criminal record for the reader. Also, for the first time in 300 years, protest demonstrations within a one kilometre radius of Parliament are criminal offences, whether you are waving a Union Jack or not.

Portly Gordon Brown is positioning himself to take Blair's place as leader and, as he fails to impress the big players in Euro capitalism, he constantly needs new gimmicks to gain attention. African poverty played for a while but cynicism meant that, with nothing achieved, he had to move on. The Britishness ploy came less than a week after Blair's

'respect' reform proposals to combat youth crime had been widely publicised.

Nationalism is a reactionary, anti-working class ideology. It falsely identifies workers' interests with those of their exploiters, the capitalist class. Britishness means regarding the rest of the world as foreign, not the same as us. Each of the other competing nations in the world of capitalism teaches its wage-slaves the same isolating attitudes. It is against this perverse background that workers are prepared to kill each other in wars of plunder, waged to further enrich those who own the earth and its resources.

How behind the times all this is can be seen from reading THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO of nearly 160 years ago, written by Marx and Engels: *The Communists are further reproached with desiring to abolish countries and nationality. The working men have no country. We cannot take from them what they have not got.*

The great rallying call at the end of the Manifesto is more desperately urgent in modern capitalism than ever. *The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Working men of all countries unite!*

This is a call to establish world Socialism, something the flag-minded Labour Party knows nothing about. Socialism will be a world society based upon commonly owned means of production, a classless world without markets, profits and national states, where socially equal people will co-operate to produce an abundance of useful things to freely satisfy human needs.

#### JESUS IN COURT

An Italian law-court was recently called on to decide a knotty question: did Jesus exist or had churchmen down the centuries been deceiving us (INDEPENDENT, 28 January 2006). Two old friends had fallen out on this subject: one, an atheist, held that his friend, a Catholic priest, had a criminal case to answer: he had "*abused 'popular belief' by fraudulently deceiving his flock, and... he financially gained from claiming that a man called John of Gamala was actually Jesus Christ*". What the learned judge's verdict was we can only guess.

It is most unlikely that any mere law-court could stop the bible-bashers of Italy or any other christian country from continuing to believe in the loaves-and-fishes and water-into-wine legends, and other incredible myths like that of the 'virgin birth'. And it is even more improbable that the Vatican and other churches would suddenly, having 'seen the light', surrender all their ill-gotten gains, and do as their hypothetical Jesus (aka John of Gamala) instructed, i.e. sell all that they have and give to the poor. Now that *would* be a miracle for journalists to write about - one which would seriously upset the Stock Exchanges of the capitalist world.

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## The Left and Islamic Capitalism - Part 1

### The Capitalist Left

What is the "*Left*"? In Britain today there are about 25 known left-wing groups who are either supporters of Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin or a combination of the three.

The Left's track record leaves a lot to be desired. The Left has supported Mao and Chinese state capitalism, Cuban capitalism, the capitalism of Allende in Chile, the genocide of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, the tyranny of Vietnamese capitalism, various dictatorships in Latin America, and so on right up to Serbia and Iraq. Anything and anyone except Socialism.

So we should not be surprised by the dishonest opportunism of the Socialist Workers Party about radical Islam following the war in Afghanistan, Living Marxism's support for Serbia and its concentration camps in the late 1990s, and the Revolutionary Communist Party's support for any country or political group who oppose the United States.

George Orwell saw the left as a crowd of eccentrics: sandal wearers, health fanatics, carrot-juice drinkers; disaffected bourgeois intellectuals who replaced patriotism for one country with patriotism for another. Orwell himself supported

British capitalism but his remark highlights the anti-socialist politics of the left with its "*your enemy is my enemy*" view of international politics.

The historical definition of "*the left*" comes from the sitting arrangement of the French assembly. The radicals sat on the left side of the chamber. Jacobinism and the revolutionary wars represented a *left-wing politics* associated with Marat, Saint-Just and Robespierre in France, and Tom Paine in Britain (he is remembered as the author of COMMON SENSE and as a supporter of the American revolutionary wars).

Through Blanqui and direct action there is a historical continuity with the anti-parliamentarian left, including Lenin and his followers. It was in this respect that, The SPGB analysed the capitalist left in the many editions of the pamphlet QUESTIONS OF THE DAY.

*The 'Left-Wing' organisations generally claim to be Marxist; but they interpret this to mean either the anti-Marxist policy of Lenin based on Louis Blanqui's doctrine of minority armed seizure of power followed by dictatorship, or the equally anti-Marxist doctrine which holds that the workers can revolutionise society without needing to control the State power.* Questions of the Day, 1978 edition, p58

Before the collapse of state capitalism in Eastern Europe, the capitalist Left had certain characteristics that marked it off from other political groups and parties within capitalism. Besides advocating the anti-working class ideas of Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin, with their talk of "*direct action*", "*permanent revolution*" and "*socialism in one country*", there were a number of distinctive anti-socialist policies.

Foremost, there was the preference for the state owning some or all of the means of production, as opposed to private or corporate ownership. The SPGB described large scale nationalisation as "*state capitalism*", and spent the best part of a century showing up this form of class exploitation as nothing more than an anti-working class system of wage slavery.

The Left also had a list of political reforms, a politics that went back to the old social democrat groups of the late 19th century: taxing the rich, nationalisation of the top 200 companies, and so on. This failed politics can be seen in the disreputable Manifesto at the last General Election of the anti-socialist organisation calling itself Respect. This Manifesto had a list of a dozen or so reforms but said nothing about the urgent need for the working class to establish Socialism. No surprise there for Socialists: the leadership of Respect do not think the workers are cut out for Socialist ideas.

And of course there is George Galloway, Respect's only MP, who in 1994 had this to say to Saddam Hussein:  
*I salute your courage, your strength, your indefatigability... Your Excellency... I thought the president would appreciate to know that even today, three years after the war, I still meet families who are calling their newborn sons Saddam.*

Galloway claims he is no Leninist. He is no believer in the degrading ritual that is Islam but he sits comfortably with the Respect leadership made up of other left-wing groups, radical Islamicists, and the SWP. They all deserve each other.

With the disappearance of the USSR in the late 1980s and the utter failure of Leninism, the capitalist left were dealt another major political blow with the abandonment by the Labour Party of the old Clause 4. Like Thatcher and the Tories, Tony Blair embraced economic liberalism which had been a central dogma of the Party before the Webbs wrote its Constitution in 1918, at a time when British capitalism was considered the workshop of the world and free trade was the ruling doctrine.

Following the eclipse of their cherished policies, the left have been trying to find a political niche ever since. And they have now found it in the poverty and alienation of large ethnic groups, economic migrants and asylum seekers within British cities.

## Socialist Principle versus Left-Wing Opportunism

The SPGB does not share its platform with political parties, whether avowedly capitalist or not. We allow opponents

to take our platform to state their case but only to show that their anti-working class ideas are demonstrably wrong and have nothing to offer the working class. Nor does The SPGB share a platform with imams, bishops and religious leaders. We do not accept for membership candidates who hold religious beliefs. We are opposed to all religion as superstitious poison on a par with nationalism and the craven following of political leaders.

A little reflection shows why we only want Socialists in The SPGB, and why we will not align ourselves with other political organisations - those who do not accept the revolutionary use of parliament to establish Socialism and the need for opposition to religion, nationalism, war and reforms. Take the hypothetical case of someone who was both simultaneously a member of a party which advocated the revolutionary use of parliament and a member of a group who advocated direct action. Not only would that person be in a contrary position of holding two opposite political beliefs but, if the party who held the case for the revolutionary use of parliament debated against the group who advocated direct action, that person would be in the strange position of being in two parties publicly opposing each other.

For The SPGB this is no problem. We only have members in the Party who agree with and are prepared to defend The SPGB's Object and Declaration of Principles. It is all or nothing. We do not have as members those who support or are members of other political organisations, just as we do not have members who believe in the servility and anti-human doctrines of religion, no matter what the religious idiocy may entail. We would rather have 25 Socialists in the Party rather than 100 socialists and two non-socialists.

But then The SPGB is not the misnamed Socialist Workers Party. The SWP leadership are also the leadership of the political party known as Respect: the former supporting direct action, the latter supporting parliamentary reform action. The very same leadership are also on the Stop the War Coalition's national committee: a rainbow alliance of Left parties, CND and the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB). The SPGB would not invite opponents to write in The SPGB except in opposition. But the Islamic fundamentalist, Salma Yaqoob, was uncritically given space to air her views in the SWP's journal *International Socialism* (no.100, p39) where she called for Muslims and non-Muslims alike to build "*powerful working relationships*" (p62), and for "*socialists*" to regard Muslims as their allies. All with the blessing of the SWP leadership. So it comes as no surprise that the capitalist left either quietly admires the Islamic Jihad or tries to court Islamic groups for their own political ends. [*to be continued*]

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## Capitalism and Religion Deny Freedom

Along with Socialism, freedom and democracy are two of the most commonly used and widely falsified words in the English language. How is freedom and what it means determined? There is an old rule-of-thumb guide to democracy which goes: "*I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it*" (Voltaire). The condition for the freedom of expression of one group or set of opinions is the condition for the freedom of expressing opinions in general.

All this turns out to be rather vague because it takes no account of capitalism and conflicting class interests. In a society where the means of mass propaganda are, like the means of production, owned by a small minority class, there is little freedom of expression for the majority who, in fact, are exploited to maintain the wealth of the very class which oppresses them. A subject class that spends its life on the labour-market can, by definition, hardly be free. Democracy, when the agenda is set by power, wealth and religion, also leaves working class interests out of account. The ability to go and vote every four or five years for the capitalists' agenda, as set out in the programmes of capitalist political parties, only has the effect of confirming capitalist class power.

The voice of Socialism and the struggle to end class society, in favour of a unified human society of production solely for use, is to say the least marginalised by bourgeois 'freedom and democracy'. There is no mass media for the expression of Socialist ideas. In a classless world, where all people will be socially equal, free expression will be accompanied by unfettered access to information, a real democracy - a society run by and for everybody.

Under capitalism, such limited freedom of speech and expression as exists is further circumscribed by the pressure

and fear that can be brought to bear by special interest groups such as religious organisations. In the furore that broke out over the publication of cartoons depicting Mohammed in Danish newspapers, Muslims burnt flags outside the Danish embassy in London and several Danish embassies in the Middle East were destroyed. While denying anybody the right or freedom to publish such cartoons, Muslim demonstrators carried banners with the slogan: "*Behead those who insult Islam*".

Italian newspapers defiantly reproduced the cartoons as "*a defence of freedom*". The British press "*bravely*" decided not to. Jack Straw, Britain's Foreign Secretary, attacked European papers for publishing them, and said the cartoons were "*disrespectful, insulting and unnecessary*". As he spoke, Europeans were leaving Palestine in fear of their lives after threats from Muslim militants. Mr Straw did not say whether he found the demand to behead people to be "*disrespectful*", etc.

The Daily Mail (4 February 2006) carried five cartoons taken from papers in various Islamic countries. These cartoons depict Israeli politicians, with bloodstained hands, killing children. They are no less abusive than the Danish cartoons but not without foundation, given Israel's conduct over several decades. The point of the Danish cartoons was to depict Islamic bombers: given their past conduct and subsequent reactions, also not without foundation. If Islam had any concept of freedom at all, it is expressed in the attitude: "*don't do as we do - do as we say*".

Another powerful pressure-group, in fact the corner-stone of the British capitalist propaganda machine, namely the BBC, had its own shabby little incident, which involved spying on a meeting held by the British National Party. This led to two leading members of the BNP being prosecuted on charges of "...intending to stir up racial hatred and alternative charges of conduct likely to stir up racial hatred" (TIMES, 24 January 2006). When two out of four charges were thrown out, the result was far greater publicity for BNP opinions than would have been the case without the covert action of the BBC.

It would be a strange concept of democracy that held that only sound ideas should be expressed.

The SPGB regards all other political parties, including the BNP, as enemies of the working class in that they all seek to retain capitalism. They all promote nationalism with varying degrees of intensity. They all stand in the way of workers uniting on a world scale and ending the barriers of race, religion and nationalism, so that Socialism can be established.

The SPGB has always made a practice of debating opponents and discussing our case against theirs. This is by far the best way to demonstrate publicly which ideas are erroneous. In the periods before and after World War II, when 'Communist Party' rabble used to break up meetings to which they were opposed (including those of The SPGB), The SPGB debated against the British Union of Fascists and the post-war National Front. The case and conduct of the so-called Communist Party and of the other fascists has always been closely similar, both in and out of power.

Unless lessons are learned from history, all the nonsense of the past will be repeated, perhaps next time dressed up as religion. When President Bush tells the world we are all going to have his version of 'freedom', there is nothing left to choice. It is the same when Islamists say they will rule the earth. Only conflict and repression lie down those roads. Freedom and democracy, in any meaningful sense of these terms, imply conscious cooperation in the classless world of Socialism.

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## Marxism and Liberation Theology

In the BULLETIN OF THE MARX MEMORIAL LIBRARY (Number 142), Fr. Geoff Bottoms, a theologian, was given space to argue a case for the compatibility of Marxism with liberation theology. Is this so? Marxism is the science of social evolution. Three principal components constitute Marxism: a theory of history (popularly known as the materialist conception of history), a labour theory of value and surplus value, and a political concept of the class struggle.

What does Fr. Bottoms understand about Marxism? Nothing. Little or nothing is said of materialism, class exploitation and the class struggle. Instead he plays an old academic game of "reappraising" the classical Marxist texts, which means ignoring what Marx wrote on religion and social alienation, the derivation of profit from surplus value, and the centrality of the class struggle in human history.

This is what Fr. Bottoms writes:

*... it could be argued that Marx and Engels do not simply claim that a scientific view of society and history provides an alternative to religion as a means of human liberation but that a Marxist analysis of the situation can provide useful methodological pointers to action motivated in part by religious belief. That has been the position of the proponents of liberation theology* (p6).

Marx and Engels never said any such thing. For both of them, as for Socialists today, the working class were and are the social force to replace capitalism with Socialism. Moreover, Marx and Engels saw religion as a body of ideas which either supported the capitalist class or gave a psychological comfort for the symptoms of a class society. Actions motivated by religious belief act as a barrier to a clear socialist understanding of capitalism and the reason why the profit system can never be made to work in the interests of all of society. Action motivated by religious belief turns attention away from the private property ownership of the means of production towards the effects of commodity production and exchange for profit.

Marx was quite clear about the dangers inherent in religion and the damage it inflicts on those who hold to its beliefs. He also explained religion, both as a symptom of oppression and as a fetish. In one of his early writings, TOWARD THE CRITIQUE OF HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY OF RIGHT, he wrote:

*Religious suffering is at one and the same time the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions.*

And later, Marx likened the alienation associated with commodities to the fetishism of religious belief:

*The religious reflex of the real world can... only then finally vanish, when the practical relations of everyday life offer to man none but perfectly intelligible and reasonable relations with regard to his fellowmen and to nature.*

CAPITAL, VOL. 1, chapter 1 (iv): The Fetishism of Commodities

Socialism, which implies the abolition of buying and selling, the abolition of the wages system and the abolition of capital, liberates men and women from religion as well as from wage slavery. In a free and open classless society, where production takes place directly to meet social need, religion will be absent from the lives of millions of people. No more the degradation of charity and celibacy. No more mysticism. No more lives distorted by anti-scientific myths, no more pompous sermons and cloying morality.

Fr. Bottoms also brings up the old chestnut that primitive communism is to be found in the New Testament.

The science of anthropology, from Engels's THE ORIGIN OF THE FAMILY, PRIVATE PROPERTY AND THE STATE and Henry Morgan's ANCIENT SOCIETY onwards, shows that primitive communism was a form of social system prior to class society. But the New Testament was written during the slave societies of Egypt, Greece and Rome. The pious quotations found in the New Testament are directed at a spiritual world, not the social world. The Early Christian sects are no models for a Socialist society. The Acts of the Apostles, quoted by Fr Bottoms as support for a "New Testament Communism", is based on spiritual advancement to Heaven, not a revolutionary change in society. Spartacus is preferable to any naive Christian thrown to the lions. Those slaves who died on crosses along the Appian Way to Rome deserve more historical respect than the deluded moralist on Calvary whose pious sermons would have the effect of retaining class systems rather than change them.

Marx did not start with the New Testament but with the material world in which men and women have to produce their existence. He started with real men and women as they relate to each other and to the means of production.

*Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence...* THE GERMAN

## IDEOLOGY

The basis of Marx's theory of history is materialism. Thomas Huxley once wrote: "*as long as we actually observe and think, we cannot possibly get away from materialism*". Marx quoted these words approvingly in a letter to Engels (12 December 1868). Marx was a scientific materialist and considered himself "*a man of science*".

Materialism leaves no room for religion. Marx declared: "*I am a materialist and Hegel is an idealist*" (letter to Kugelmann, 6 March 1868). He went on to say: "*With me... the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought*" (CAPITAL, VOLUME 1, Afterword to the second German edition, 1873). Engels too, in summarising Feuerbach, wrote: "*Matter is not a product of mind, but mind itself is merely the highest form of matter*" (LUDWIG FEUERBACH, chap. 2, 1888).

So who does Fr. Bottoms call upon to justify his liberation theology? Here are a few names: Fidel Castro, the South African Communist Party, Pope Leo XIII, Pope Pius XI, and the Catholic Church's teaching on social justice. An eccentric, political and religious, cocktail: each and every one of them totally opposed to Marx's ideas.

Fidel Castro rules over a dictatorship which favours Lenin and distorts Marx. Cuban capitalism exploits wage-labour; there are no free trade unions, and Socialist ideas against Castro and his regime are suppressed. The South African Communist Party bowed its head to Moscow for much of its existence, and accepts the Leninist doctrine that workers are incapable of understanding and establishing Socialism.

As for the Catholic Church, it has argued only for a reconciliation of interests between capital and labour, preaching to employers to pay a 'fair wage' and to the workers to be content with "*a fair day's pay for a fair day's work*". Where, in the actions of the Catholic Church, has there ever been any acknowledgement of the class struggle and the need for the working class to abolish the wages system?

In fact, successive popes, in the interests of the capitalist class in Latin America, where liberation theology had its spiritual home, have largely castrated the movement. The Catholic Church, like all institutional religion, is wedded to the interests of capitalism. It is also a vile and sinister organization. One of its offshoots is the Opus Dei organisation. "*Let us bless pain, sanctify pain, and glorify pain*", said the movement's founder, Jose Maria Escriva, canonised by the last pope. It's an instruction some devotees honour by wearing a spiky garter around the top of their thighs (CHANNEL 4, 11 December 2005).

Socialists do not use philosophical ideas against religion. The Socialist case against religion is a materialist one, grounded in cosmology, geology, biology, anthropology and history. Socialists work from the basis of materialism. Materialism rejects the existence of any supernatural entity, or anything outside or "above" nature. There is, in fact, no need for any such explanation for life and the universe - least of all today. Nature furnishes its own explanations and it furnishes them in great abundance.

Science has proved that the human species has developed - like every other species - over millions of years, and that life itself has evolved from inorganic matter. There cannot be a brain without a central nervous system, and there cannot be a central nervous system without a material body, blood, bones, muscles etc. In turn, the body must be sustained by food derived from a material environment. Modern genetics has given evidence which supports the materialist view of the world, as have other sciences. Modern genetic research has shown creationism and, by extension, the religions of Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and so on to be false. Modern genetics, for example, has shown as being false the childish belief that every species was created separately and that people have souls. Science also undercuts the illusion of life after death which gives false comfort to millions of wage-slaves. In his book THE OXFORD MURDERS, G Martinez ridicules the resurrection of Christ:

*...In the first twenty-four hours, after rigor mortis, the body starts to dry out. The blood stops exporting oxygen, the cornea turns cloudy, the iris and pupils become distorted, the skin shrivels. On the second day, the large intestine starts to putrefy, and the first green patches appear on the skin. The internal organs have shut down, tissues become soft. The third day, as decomposition progresses, gas bloats the abdomen and the limbs take on a green, marbled appearance. A compound of carbon and oxygen emanates from the body ...By the end of the third day, Christ would have been a monstrous piece of waste, incapable of sitting up, foul-smelling and blind. That is the truth (pp 72-3).*

Science has liberated men and women from religion. It is only the ruling-class ideas pumped out by the state, family

and priests which chain the working class to this superstitious conservatism, and which sustain the social evil it preaches. Darwin in natural science and Marx in social science long put paid to religion as a serious intellectual body of ideas.

To recap, the reasons why Marxism is incompatible with religion are fourfold. First, the materialist has his foot firmly on the ground while the religious thinker is a fanciful dreamer diverting workers' attention away from the real world to imaginary worlds of gods and angels. Second, religion gives support for the ruling class by either teaching a social conservatism or a social reformism (which is exactly what liberation theology amounts to). Third, religion dehumanises men and women by making them servile believers in a creation of their own making; slaves to an abstraction. And fourth, religion not only blesses various nation states in peace and in war but, by insisting that there is a God to be revered and worshipped, it creates a spiritual leadership just as dangerous as a political one.

Religion, like nationalism and leadership, is an intellectual barrier to Socialism. Marx showed that workers have to think and act in their own interests. But religion keeps workers on their knees. Religion is a symptom facing workers in a society where the cause of the problem is the private ownership of the means of production.

That Fr. Bottoms should have been given a platform by THE BULLETIN OF THE MARX MEMORIAL LIBRARY should come as no surprise since it is still controlled by the dead hand of the Communist Party of Great Britain who tend Lenin's Clerkenwell shrine.

Leninism - now *there's* a religious cult the Library needs liberating from.

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## Why We *Oppose* The Stop The War Coalition

Capitalism throughout its history, and currently, has turned the world into a vast battle-field. All the major powers have extensive arsenals of 'conventional' and nuclear weapons. Wars occur when one or more sections of the capitalist class see their interests threatened by rival capitalists. High among the things over which rival sections of the capitalist class and their governments brainwash workers into killing and dying for are oil and areas of strategic importance.

Workers' interests are the same the world over. They own no countries, no oil or any other resources. As wage-slaves in a profit-driven society, the interest of the working class lies in ending capitalism, thereby getting rid of the cause of war and many other social scourges, including poverty.

The Stop the War Coalition and those on the Left associated with them, despite these undeniable facts, continue to spread the fantastic nonsense that capitalism can exist without war. Starting with the American-led war on Iraq, they failed to Stop the War. Last year, they conducted a campaign to get the TROOPS OUT of Iraq. That also failed. Now, they are again making futile demands for the "*immediate withdrawal of troops*", this at the very time when thousands more British troops are going to Afghanistan, and Donald Rumsfeld talks of a "*lengthy war against terrorism*", identifying Iran as the "*leading state-sponsor of terrorism*".

It is easy to expose the war-mongering claptrap of Bush and Blair. But, when the STWC write about Iraqi workers being "*able to decide for themselves how they want their own country to be governed*", their ignorance of capitalism is exposed. Workers have no country.

Where are the ten million anti-war protesters of 2003 now? A series of limited demands has done nothing but dissipate the enthusiasm of those involved. The urgent need is for workers to be persuaded to abandon support for capitalism and nationalism. Plundering the world for oil and profits serves the capitalists, not the workers. As long as capitalism remains, it will continue to produce conflict, varying from individual acts of terrorism to gigantic armed struggles spreading over the oceans and continents.

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# Body Parts and Bones - For Sale

When Alistair Cooke (the famous broadcaster and a venerable pillar of the establishment) died, before the cremation his cancerous bones were cut from his corpse, stolen, and sold illegally to transplant companies.

Bones and other body parts are big business in the US: "*hundreds of corpses [are] dismembered illegally for profit for America's lucrative organ transplant industry.*" Anything may be used and re-used: bones, veins, skin, heart valves...

*Market demand for body parts is wide-ranging - from pure research to skin and bone grafts, from cosmetic surgery to penis enlargement... [with better anti-rejection drugs]. human bones are used in 400,000 grafts a year... Human bone is also ground for cement in orthopaedic operations and used as dental filler... The bone theft industry in the US is estimated to be worth \$500m.* THIS WEEK, 14 January 2006

There is "*an entire cadaver-based economy involving undertakers, hospices, research companies and body banks*" and, if you want your funeral done on the cheap or free, a macabre, grisly, deal can be done, with your own body parts. To make the trade legit, there is talk in the US of a "*futures market*" in organs. In Europe there is growing demand for kidneys whilst supply comes inevitably from the very poor, the very desperate:

*In destitute Moldova a conveyer belt of people are mortgaging their bodies... India, before it passed new laws to ban the practice, was known as the "great organs bazaar".*

India has been overtaken by China, where prisoners are "*shot dead through the skull to avoid damaging the organs*" and, according to Amnesty International, 90% of all transplanted organs in China come from executed prisoners.

Socialists used to declare that the working class own nothing but their labour power, that workers have nothing to sell but their ability to work. Perhaps we should revise this statement, now that capitalism has turned to cannibalism, and the rich consume the very veins and heart valves of the poor.

## ON RIDICULING RELIGION

Ridicule is quite a legitimate weapon. It is the weapon Voltaire used, and did more good with it than with any amount of serious argument. We think the Christian religion an immoral illusion, and we wish to use any argument to persuade the people that it is false. Ridicule appeals to the people we have to deal with, with much greater force than any amount of serious logical argument. The striking difference of this century and the last is, that free-thought was the privilege of the working class now. We want to make them disregard the mythical next world and live for this world, and insist on having what will make it pleasant to them.

Eleanor Marx to Beatrice Webb, MS. Diary of B. Webb, 24 May 1883

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# Marx, Engels and Darwin

Darwin's ideas, set out in his book, THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES BY MEANS OF NATURAL SELECTION (1859), are important to Socialist theory since they give a scientific refutation of all religions based on creation myths.

THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES not only provided convincing evidence for earlier theories about the evolution of animals and plants, but also advanced new revolutionary concepts of evolution. Over time, complex organisms had developed from simple micro-organisms. Variation, specialisation and adaptation to environmental conditions produced the distinguishing characteristics of the various species. Although Darwin's ideas have been developed, the mark of any strong scientific theory, the evolution of living beings is an accepted scientific fact.

Darwin's demolition of religion was appreciated by Marx and Engels. Engels wrote to Marx: "*Darwin, whom I am just now reading, is splendid*" (quoted from C Zirkle, EVOLUTION, MARXIAN BIOLOGY AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES, 1959, pp85-7). Marx wrote back to Engels (19 December 1860), saying: "... *this is the book which contains the basis in natural history for our view.* (ibid, pp85-7).

In a letter Marx wrote to Lassalle (16 January 1861), he said:

*Darwin's book is very important and it suits well that it supports the class struggle in history from the point of view of natural science. One has, of course, to put up with the crude English method of discourse. Despite all deficiencies, it not only deals the death-blow to "teleology" [a first cause argument going back to Aristotle that supports creationism] in the natural sciences for the first time but also sets forth the rational meaning in an empirical way.*

Marx was referring to the crude empiricism of English natural philosophy which operated on the premise that all knowledge is derived from direct experience. Marx saw this as superficial and vulgar because a reasoning process must penetrate beneath the level of surface appearances. Wage-labour, for example, appears free but in reality the worker is imprisoned within the exploitative wages system which only a labour theory of value can bring to light.

Marx (letter to Engels, 18 June 1862) was also critical of Darwin's use of Malthus's theory of population:

*As regards Darwin, whom I have looked at again, it amuses me that he says he applies the "Malthusian" theory also to plants and animals, as if Malthus's whole point did not consist in the fact that his theory is applied not to plants and animals, but only to human beings - in geometrical progression - as opposed to plants and animals. It is remarkable that Darwin recognises among brutes and plants his English society with its division of labour, competition, opening up of new markets, "inventions" and Malthusian "struggle for existence". It is Hobbes's bellum omnium contra omnes [war of everyone against everyone]...*

In fact, it is co-operative labour within society that has guaranteed human survival, not competition. Competition is destructive and unpleasant, and is a feature of capitalism in its drive for profit. Marx explained that the very forces of production that give the potential for abundance lead, under capitalism, to misery, social alienation, unemployment and war.

Competition compels every capitalist to use every means to survive, from constant attacks on workers' wages and working conditions, to destroying competitors, to speeding up work, restructuring and down-sizing the organisation, outsourcing, relocation to regions where wages are lower, and even plant closures. Workers, too, are forced to compete; first at school and university then, as workers, for jobs and the scramble for existence within the wages system with its resultant blame culture, managerial bullying, racism, sexism and other negative behaviour. Competition under capitalism is not natural but social. It is imposed upon the working class by private property ownership, and can be removed through the establishment of a system based on co-operation, on the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production by all of society.

Marx revealed his sympathy for Darwin by sending him in 1873 a personally inscribed copy of the recently published second edition of CAPITAL. Darwin acknowledged the book. However, he never read CAPITAL, the vast majority of the pages remaining uncut in his library.

Engels also admired Darwin:

*Nature is the proof of dialectics, and it must be said for modern science that it has furnished this proof with very rich materials increasing daily, and thus has shown that, in the last resort, nature works dialectically and not metaphysically... In this connection, Darwin must be named above all others. He dealt the metaphysical conception of Nature the heaviest blow by his proof that all organic beings, plants, animals, and man himself, are the products of a process of evolution going on through millions of years.*

## SOCIALISM, UTOPIAN AND SCIENTIFIC (section 2)

And at Marx's funeral, Engels stated:

*Just as Darwin discovered the law of evolution in organic nature, so Marx discovered the law of evolution in human history.*

Like Marx, Engels was critical of the use of Darwin's ideas to justify capitalism. When attempts were made to explain human history as a continuation of the Darwinian "struggle for existence" in animal evolution, Engels objected stating:

*The most that the animal can achieve is to collect; man produces, he prepares the means of life in the widest sense of the word, which, without him, nature would never have produced. This makes impossible the immediate transference of the laws of life in animal societies to human ones.*

Social laws are not natural laws. Social laws have a history. Social evolution has known several social systems with their own peculiarities. They have come, and gone.

Today, in the order of evolution, the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom. The commodity form of exploitation of the working class will end with the establishment of a classless society based on production for social use. The law of value, for example, is peculiar to capitalism where "... *that which determines the magnitude of the value of any article is the amount of labour socially necessary, or the labour-time socially necessary for its production*" (Marx, CAPITAL, VOLUME I, chapter 1). Surplus-value has no application to slave or feudal societies, although surplus labour took place and was appropriated by a ruling class.

Engels underscored this point with reference to economics:

*Political economy... cannot be the same for all countries and for all historical epochs... Political economy is... essentially a historical science. It deals with material which is historical, that is, constantly changing.*

ANTI-DUHRING, Part II, Section 1 (see also Part I, Section IX)

The system of commodity production and exchange for profit, with its effect of competition and periodic trade depressions, is historically transient, as is the theory which studies the anarchy of capitalism.

Engels even wrote an important paper, developing Darwin's ideas of natural evolution into social evolution, entitled "*The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man*".

These quotations demonstrate that Marx and Engels did not need a theory of religion after the publication of Darwin's ORIGIN OF SPECIES. The science of evolution refuted all forms of religion and superstition, including creationism, leaving a materialist account of life and human existence everywhere triumphant except in the minds of the superstitious and ignorant.

The more important task for Marx and Engels was to demonstrate to the working class that capitalism could not be reformed in their interest, including the pious reforms of priests and bishops. They showed that capitalism, with a beginning and an end in the class struggle, is situated in human history as part of social evolution. They showed that the workers were the social force necessary to end class privilege and class wealth. The resolution of workers' problems means to take conscious and political action as Socialists, that is, to replace capitalism with Socialism.

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## The Reality of Chinese Capitalism

There is an idiotic theory in politics and it goes something like this. If a group of people gain control of political power and then go on to describe themselves as "*socialists*", and the social system of the country they govern is referred to as "*socialism*", then this becomes the state of affairs irrespective of the existence of class relations, private property ownership and the wages system. Likewise, if these people claim to be "*Marxists*" and followers of Marx, then this also is deemed to be the case about themselves and the country they rule.

To illustrate how stupid and crass this doctrine is, consider the example of someone who attained political power and decreed that night is day and day is night or that  $1+1=5$ . You would think they were one penny short of a pound. Just because someone claims to be "*Socialist*" and the country they rule to be "*Socialism*" does not make it the case. In fact, where you find political leaders and a government, you will not find "*Socialism*".

The view that political power can change society at will takes on a mantle of almost theological proportions, investing a group of politicians or a political leader with an absolute power which they do not possess.

An example of this naive thinking can be seen in a recent article in the Times. Under the heading of "*China plans to profit from Marx*" (3 January 2006), Jane Macartney uncritically reported on the latest twists and turns of China's

ruling class. Nowhere did she criticise the Chinese government's claim to be "*Marxist*" or their bogus reference to China as "*Socialist*". THE TIMES, like the rest of the media, associates Marx and his revolutionary ideas with dictators, dictatorship and totalitarianism. According to Ms Macartney:  
*At an autumn meeting of China's all-powerful Politburo, Hu Jintao, the President and Communist Party chief, proposed a revival in Marxism for modern China. An £18 million Marxism-Leninism academy has opened in Beijing to mark the 112th anniversary on December 26th of the birth of Chairman Mao.*

Ms Macartney was surprised:

*The relevance of Marxism may be hard to grasp with Mao's Little Red Book consigned to shelves of Cultural Revolution Kitsch.*

She went on to state that the Chinese ruling class has a problem of how to reconcile the large-scale nationalisation of the past with the free market of today: Few people, even in the ruling party, do more these days than pay lip-service to 'communist' ideology. Disillusion with Marxism-Leninism set in during Mao's 1966-76 ultra-leftist cultural revolution. Mr Hu may have few illusions that a new Marxist-Leninist academy will send party members rushing to read DAS KAPITAL.

By way of "*balance*" she quoted Zhang Tongxin, of the Marxist Institute of the People's University of Beijing: "*since reform a considerable number of people have forgotten China is a Socialist country*".

The fact is, China has never been a socialist country. So, how are we to dispose of such political nonsense? By applying Marxist ideas.

## Is China a Socialist Country?

China is not a Socialist country. Socialism was not established by a Socialist majority through their own independent action. There has never been common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution by all of society. The litmus test of production for social use does not hold in China where production for the market holds true today, as it did under Mao. There is a working class in China so it is not a classless society of free men and women.

Even the capitalist media are forced to report on the condition of the working class in China. Recently, THE INDEPENDENT (14 January 2006) illustrated the conditions of the working class in China by referring to "*illegal, exhausting and dangerous conditions*". It went on to discuss a report which stated that:

*It found an army of powerless rural immigrants toiling up to 14 hours a day, almost every day. Many were allowed just one day off and paid £50 a month for shifts that breached Chinese law and International Labour Organisation rules.*

THE INDEPENDENT was only voicing the fear that such a pool of cheap labour puts British capitalism at a competitive disadvantage against lower labour costs in China, enabling China to export cheaper goods on the world market. The owners of THE INDEPENDENT have no interest in the working class except as a means of exploitation and the acceptance of capitalist ideas.

But, for Socialists, the existence of such anti-working class conditions, and the existence of the wages system and of class exploitation, demonstrate from a Marxist position that China has capitalism, not Socialism. In this, the working class in China have the same interest as the working class throughout the world: the abolition of capitalism and its replacement with Socialism.

And what of the capitalist class in China? In an article, *China's new rich learn to flaunt it* (GUARDIAN, 14 January 2006), we are introduced to China's capitalist class. Here are three of their representatives: Hang Guangyu has a fortune of £1 billion pounds from his electronic appliances business, Yan Jiehe has a fortune of £850 million from road building, and Timothy Chen Tianqio is a multimillionaire from his online games and internet portal business.

It would be interesting to know from Zhang Tongzin of the so-called "*Marxist Institute*" how the capitalist class in China amassed such fortunes.

This question has been put to the Chinese Embassy in London with an invitation to debate the issue but no reply has been received. Dictatorships are known for their political cowardice.

## Reading Capital

Ms Macartney's snide reference to only a few members of the Chinese Communist Party rushing to read Marx's *CAPITAL* can be met by the question: *when did members of the CCP ever read Marx's CAPITAL?*

If they did study Marx's ideas, they would realise that, wherever a working class is forced to sell its labour-power for a wage or salary, exploitation takes place through the mechanism of the production of surplus value. The law of value applies to Chinese capitalism, as it does wherever a working class is to be found. Marx's labour theory of value is just as applicable to Chinese capitalism as it is to other capitalist countries where the value of a commodity is determined by the socially necessary abstract labour that goes into its production.

They would also read Marx's analysis of the 19th century primitive accumulation and concentration of capital, features echoed in today's China. The 800 millions who constitute the working class in China represent a vast pool of exploitable labour. In a large country seeking to accumulate capital quickly, the repercussion of cheap labour is pretty unpleasant, and the rate, intensity and extent of exploitation makes the life of a worker in China often ugly, brutal and short. The 5,000 or more dead miners a year, the use of children in sweat shops, and the general grind of wage-slavery in Chinese factories, offices and shops parallel the conditions Marx studied in 19th century Britain.

The facts of China's development confirm Marx's theory of history, his political concept of the class struggle, and his labour theory of value. Those in China who do read Marx would appreciate what an accurate reflection his theories are of their own country's transition: from feudalism to a state-controlled capitalism to the 'free market' capitalism of today.

## Mao, the Little Red Book and the Cultural Revolution

What of Mao and his thoughts: are they Marxist? Not at all. They are the ramblings of a dictator, someone who wanted to retain political power at the expense of others, and whose negative effect on Socialism he shared with other dictators like Lenin and Stalin. Rather than influencing history, Mao like Lenin was shaped by history, condemned to set China on a particular route of capitalist development.

Mao emerged as the leader of the Chinese Communist party in the mid-1930s. With little opportunity to win support among industrial workers, the CCP concentrated on the grievances of the peasant population.

In his REPORT OF AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE PEASANT MOVEMENT IN HUNAN (1927), Mao declared: "*to overthrow these feudal forces is the real objective of the revolution*". He argued that the peasants offered a mass of discontent great enough to overthrow the previous regime, as well as providing a huge reservoir of labour for capitalist exploitation which carries on today.

The Cultural Revolution of the 1960s was a period of great political and social turmoil within 20th century China. Essentially it was an internal coup staged by a political clique surrounding the Communist Party Chairman, Mao Tse Tung. They wrested power from the government by establishing a rival power base. This they achieved by encouraging and manipulating students into overthrowing established authorities. All aspects of Chinese life were affected in the process - government, economy and family. The upheavals took a great personal toll on countless individuals.

Yet for all the romanticism the Cultural Revolution had for the Left in Western Europe (where are all those Maoist bookshops now?), it was merely a political struggle within the Chinese ruling class.

Mao's LITTLE RED BOOK is not a Marxist text and offers nothing to the advancement of Socialist ideas. It is backward-looking, conservative and reactionary, replacing Marx's insistence that the socialist revolution has to be the work of the working class with the elitist view that it has to be the work of professional revolutionaries, personified in

the dictatorship of the Communist Party and its leadership.

## Nationalisation and Central Planning

There is a view, held by the TIMES and others, that central planning is a characteristic of what they call "*socialism*". It is not. The centralised planning found in large capitalist corporations cannot be regarded as "*socialist*", as economic textbooks confirm; so why is state planning of commodity production any different? The point is that under capitalism, planning, whether by the state or individual capitalist firms, comes up against the anarchy of commodity production and exchange for profit. Planning commodity production for profit is not the same as democratic planning to meet human need.

Nor is nationalisation the same as common ownership of the means of production. Nationalisation is a form of capitalism. Under nationalisation, the wages system exists, classes exist, capital exists, exploitation exists, as do trade unions and the class struggle.

## The Wages System and the Working Class

The reality of life in China is not determined by political leaders but by the existence of the private ownership of the means of production either through the state, individuals, foreign companies or private corporations.

Capitalism is a system of society based on the class ownership of the means of production and exchange, in which social wealth is produced by property-less wage workers, to be sold on a market with a view to profit. Capitalism is a class society with a privileged minority living off the labour of the exploited majority. It exists in China as it does in Britain and America; and it did so during the period of Mao as it does under his successors.

The wages system, which operates in China as it does in all capitalist countries, is a form of class rationing. The wages system restricts workers' consumption to what they need to keep themselves in efficient working order. It means that workers are deprived of the best that is available in food, clothing, housing, entertainment, travel, and so on. This does not have to be the case because modern technology has the potential for abundance to meet the needs of the world's population.

It was Marx who urged the working class to abolish the wages system, something the Chinese ruling class have no interest in abolishing.

### DEATH AND DESPAIR - BUT WHO CARES?

\* In Blair's Britain, suicides and home-alone deaths are on the increase. According to the Edinburgh coroner, Prof. Busuttil (GUARDIAN, 14 January 2006), the trend suggests that few people care.

*The deaths have become tinged with such despair. There are more suicides than there used to be. [It] used to be the prerogative of the young, 18- to 25-year-olds. Now we're seeing suicides right up to the 70s. We're also seeing more and more bodies that have been lying around for weeks. More than ever before, people are dying at home, on their own and nobody cares... No one has taken a blind bit of notice. We are, without doubt, becoming less and less of a caring society.*

\* Worldwide, 30,000 children die daily from hunger or disease, i.e. from preventable causes - Jeffrey Sachs, Special Advisor to the UN Secretary General (CHANNEL 4, 24 January 2005). If you look at how governments with money to spend actually use that money, this tells you how little *they* care.

- The UK government spends billions on the war in Iraq, and in 2004 spent over £1bn on management consultants but could only come up with a mere £200m for help after the Asian tsunami.  
- According to UN statistics, the US government's spending on arms and the military is roughly 30 times what it spends on aid and development.

\* Terrorism causes many deaths: few more tragic than the children, parents and teachers killed when Putin's state forces broke the Beslan school siege (September 2004). Yet, months later, remains of the dead were found - on a

rubbish dump! The driver who found this said: "there were body parts and clumps of hair. Dogs and foxes ate most of them" (TIMES, 26 February 2005). Apart from the grieving families, who cared? Such is capitalism, amoral and immoral, asocial and antisocial.

Chinese capitalism is no different.

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## Marx and The State

The Socialist case against capitalism is based on the fact of class exploitation, and the fact that we, the workers, do not own the land and other means of producing wealth. These, the property of the capitalist class, are protected by the state through its legal system, police, judiciary and penal system, and in the last resort by the armed forces of the state. This means that the state is not neutral: it is a class institution and, where the interests of the property-owning class are concerned, the institutions of the state do not take the side of the workers - on the contrary.

Socialists see very clearly the absolute necessity of gaining control over the machinery of government, including the armed forces, at the least so as to ensure that these forces could not be used by the capitalist class to crush the Socialist movement. To achieve a *social* revolution and to establish a new social system based on common ownership, it is essential to make use of the political machinery of government, converting it "*from an instrument of oppression into the agency of emancipation*" and so ensuring that the coercive agencies of the state, being under our control, could not be used against us.

People mostly take for granted the pervasiveness and intrusiveness of the state in our lives. Even a new-born infant comes into the world with a National Insurance number. That baby - as it grows into a toddler, a child, a teenager, a young adult - is monitored and conditioned by various state agencies. At work, there are innumerable government laws to control what you do especially if, as a trade unionist, you come out on strike. If you are disabled, sick or too old to be employable, the state has developed a bewildering variety of about 40 different 'welfare' payments. Under New Labour, state intrusiveness has reached almost totalitarian heights, with huge numbers of CCTV cameras, and the prospect of ID cards linked to a vast police database. Demonstrators are routinely filmed and their car number-plates used to identify them. Even MPs know that their phones are tapped, as a matter of routine.

Compared with Marx's time, the modern state with its numerous agencies has become hugely enlarged, invading and regulating more and more of what used to be thought of as 'civil society', while the political debate between the major capitalist parties is dominated by a never-resolved debate over just which activities should be properly in the 'public' sphere, run by government, and which ones should be kept in or returned to the 'private' sphere.

## Modern States

Since Marx's time, the nature and characteristics of the modern state has taken different forms at various times. Ambrose Bierce, an American satirist, wrote that states range from "*the pestilence of despotism to the plague of anarchy*".

There has been the rise of fascist or totalitarian states, along with the increased use of the mass media to impose a ruling party's ideology on the so-called 'masses'. Orwell's novel 1984 described an atomised, totalitarian, one-party dictatorship, where the ruling elite controlled all information: "*Who controls the past,*" ran the Party slogan, "*controls the future; who controls the present controls the past..*"

There are now many regimes of this type, e.g. China, North Korea, and various Central Asian and African states. Although the rulers like to pose as modernisers, anxious to do business with Western oil companies and the like, they are ruthless in suppressing any form of dissent, many using torture and the death penalty. Another form of state, fairly common especially in Africa and Central Asia, has been nicknamed a 'kleptocracy', one where the natural resources of the country are stolen by the ruler and his entourage. In Marx's time, the coup which brought to power Napoleon III,

with his corrupt hangers-on, was an early example of a kleptocracy, a gangster state.

Modern parliamentary states are full of contradictions. Their spokesmen get all aerated about freedom and democracy. Yet these same 'freedom-loving' politicians use draconian laws to clamp down on those they regard as undesirables, deporting them, or else holding them, interned without trial, as at Guantanamo and Belmarsh. These same democratic politicians seem to have no problems doing business with and selling arms to the most ruthless, corrupt dictators and secretly sending suspects to be 'rendered' in states known to practice torture.

## The Class State

It is useless trying to get a decent definition of this word 'state' from dictionaries because they evade the fact that the state is not a 'community', but a *class* state. Socialists offer the following explanation:

*The State is the public power of coercion. It arose out of the early division of society into classes, and developed with the development of class conflicts... Through the ages, the State has been controlled, as a rule, by the class that has been economically the most important.* The SPGB pamphlet, QUESTIONS OF THE DAY(chapter on Parliament), 1932

The state is not a single specific institution but a political power, "*the public power of coercion*", implemented through a number of agencies and institutions, including especially the armed forces and the penal system, backed by legal powers. In capitalism, in any class society, these forces will work, not in the interest of the whole 'community', but in the interest of the dominant class.

To dream - as anarchists and utopians do - of simply abolishing the state is to forget that behind the political power of the state is the economic power of the capitalist class, requiring protection for its property. The need for a state would continue as long as the class system does.

Bakunin in his book STATISM AND ANARCHY (1874), alleged that Marx recommended "*the foundation of a people's state*" and objected:

*... if the proletariat becomes the ruling class, over whom will it rule? It means that there will still remain another proletariat, which will be subject to this new domination, this new state.*

In his notes on this book, Marx answered:

*It means that so long as the other classes, especially the capitalist class, still exists, so long as the proletariat struggles with it (for when it attains government power its enemies and the old organisation of society have not yet vanished), it must employ forcible means, hence governmental means. It is itself still a class and the economic conditions from which the class struggle and the existence of classes derive have still not disappeared and must forcibly be either removed out of the way or transformed, this transformation process being forcibly hastened.*  
MARX - THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL AND AFTER, Penguin, p333

## Marx's Ideas on the State

Socialists owe a lot to Marx but Marx was not born a Marxist. It is interesting to note how he changed - what the issue was which changed him from a liberal into a revolutionary. Hegel's philosophy dominated the thinking of many Germans but, when Marx was at university, Hegel's ideas were being challenged.

For Hegel, the state was a quasi-divine power:

*God governs the world; the actual working of his government ...is the history of the world... The state is the divine Idea as it exists on earth... The State is the march of God through the world.*

[see David Thomson, POLITICAL IDEAS, Pelican, pp137-9]

President Bush, too, would subscribe to Hegel's belief that history is simply the working-out of God's divine plan.

So how did Marx arrive at his new theory of the state as a *class* state, driven by material and class interest? Thwarted in his ambition to be a professor, he got into writing for the *Rheinische Zeitung*, a progressive paper, and soon

(October 1842) became the paper's editor. But he had trouble with the Prussian censorship and the paper was banned (April 1843). From then on, state interference in his life by various governments led Marx to be forced to leave Germany, France and Belgium, finally settling as a destitute exile in London.

While he was editing the *Rheinische Zeitung*, an issue came up which made him abandon his earlier (Hegelian) view of the state as representing the whole community. Instead, he was forced to see it as an instrument of *class interest*. The matter was all about dead wood. From feudal times, it was the traditional right for German peasants to take dead wood from forests - useful as fuel, as building material, for fencing, making tools, etc. The large forest owners got the Rhenish Provincial Assembly to pass a law making it illegal to take dead wood from *any* forests.

A great to-do was made in the Landtag about protecting the large land-owners as well as the small, since, as citizens of the community, they were both entitled to equal rights of protection. Marx seized this principle and hurled it at the heads of the representatives, barbed with the following question: what protection was the state giving to the poor, the paupered wood-stealers themselves, who were also citizens of the political community?... The state had stepped forward to defend the property of one class of its citizens. But it did nothing to defend the welfare and the very lives of a still larger class - those who had no property. If it were, as it claimed, a classless state above privileged economic interest, its protecting zeal would extend to all sections of the population...

Sidney Hook, FROM HEGEL TO MARX, 1936, University of Michigan edition, 1962, pp159-160

Any intelligent observer could see that the idea that the state represents the whole community or nation is a fiction. It is not neutral as between rich and poor, as between employers and landlords, on the one hand, and workers, wage-slaves and tenants on the other. In reality, the state is a protection racket which guarantees class interests, the interests of those with property.

## Some of Marx's Key Writings on the State

Base and Superstructure: Preface (1859) to THE CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY

... *The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society - the real foundation, on which legal and political superstructures arise and to which definite forms of social consciousness correspond. The mode of production of material life determines the general character of the social, political, and spiritual processes of life...*

... *With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. In considering such transformations the distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophical - in short, ideological - forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out...*

In this condensed summary of several important points, Marx related the *economic structure* of society to the legal and political *superstructure*, i.e. the various institutions of the state.

In asserting that it is the mode of production which determines the *general* process of social, political and intellectual life, he declared that the state's role is determined *ultimately* by developments in the material, economic system. He distinguished between the real conditions of production and the various "*ideological forms*", including law and politics, in which people become conscious of the revolutionary conflict.

This passage has been subject to lots of academic discussion: Just how does the relationship between base and superstructure work out? What is the relationship between the economy and politics? Was Marx merely an economic determinist?

Marx was fully aware that the state's powers and agencies were only too real. The Prussian state censorship really had closed down his paper; the state's police and politicians had caused him to be expelled from Germany. So the state's powers and agencies were real.

In the 20th century, with the growth of powerful modern ideologies in Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, a theory arose about a quasi-independent role of ideology in sustaining class power, a theory of class 'hegemony', put

forward by the Italian Leninist, Gramsci. However, it is a mistake to assume that ideology has only recently come to have such political importance: religions have been powerful ideologies for centuries, as have nationalism and racism.

### Capital and the state: THE GERMAN IDEOLOGY, part I (1845)

*... modern capital, determined by big industry and universal competition, i.e. pure private property,... has cast off all semblance of a communal institution and has shut out the state from any influence on the development of property... Through the emancipation of private property from the community, the state has become a separate entity, beside and outside civil society; but it is nothing more than the form of organisation which the bourgeois necessarily adopt both for internal and external purposes, for the mutual guarantee of their property and interests.*

*... all struggles within the state, the struggle between democracy, aristocracy, and monarchy, the struggle for the franchise, etc., etc., are merely the illusory forms in which the real struggles of the different classes are fought out among one another...*

THE PORTABLE KARL MARX, ed. Kamenka, Penguin, pp183-4, p177

As Marx and Engels wrote in THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO, "every class struggle is a political struggle" - a contest for political control, for state power. The political arena is where the class struggle must be fought out.

In urging that the revolution must act as a political movement, that the working class needs to organise itself as a political party so as to take control of the machinery of government, including the armed forces, we Socialists echo what Marx and Engels argued in THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO [end of Part II]:

*Political power, properly so called, is merely the organised power of one class for oppressing another. If the proletariat during its contest with the bourgeoisie is compelled... to organise itself as a class, if, by means of a revolution, it makes itself the ruling class, and, as such, sweeps away by force the old conditions of production, then it will, along with these conditions, have swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms, and of classes generally, and will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class.*

Do away with classes, and there will no longer be any need for a state or for political power. The purpose of the social revolution has to be the abolition of the capitalist mode of production and the class system, including the working class itself; so the working class has to *organise itself as a class*; by abolishing all classes, the social revolution would mean the end of the state.

Today there are still too many of the Utopian school who suppose that Socialism can be achieved by direct action or a mass strike, or by setting up communes and cooperatives, or maybe by enough workers just wanting it. It is worth quoting to them what Marx wrote in his ADDRESS OF THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL (1864):

*... the lords of land and the lords of capital will always use their political privileges for the defence and perpetuation of their economical monopolies. So far from promoting, they will continue to lay every possible impediment in the way of the emancipation of labour... To conquer political power has therefore become the great duty of the working classes.*

THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL AND AFTER, Penguin, p80

Unfortunately, in the period since Marx, while the workers have enough votes to outvote the capitalists many times over, they use these votes to elect parties who only offer more reforms. Even more unfortunately, Marx's ideas have become identified with the Russian dictatorship inaugurated by Lenin - a supposed "*dictatorship of the proletariat*" (actually a ruthless dictatorship over the working class) - which unfortunately is still thought of by many as Socialism or Communism.

In 1932, The SPGB declared:

*Socialism will not be possible until the mass of the workers understand it and are prepared to vote for it... MPs are elected by adult suffrage, and the vast majority of the voters are members of the working class. The result is near enough democratic to ensure that when the mass of the working class understand the meaning of Socialism they have the means to bring it into being through Parliamentary action if they desire to do so.*

QUESTIONS OF THE DAY (chapter on Parliament)

We in The SPGB have been consistent in arguing, as Marx did, for the abolition of the wages system, for the working class to organise themselves politically and democratically *as a class in and for itself*, and to use their votes to get rid

of the class system and with that the state as the "*public power of coercion*".

## BONUSESSED OR BROKE?

In Blair's 'New Labour' Britain, there is a growing gap between those struggling to get by and those like those 3,000 elite City traders with obscenely high salaries and annual bonuses of up to £10m (INDEPENDENT, 4 February 2006). At the other end of the scale are many working-class households, including not only pensioners and others on 'benefits' but also many workers in work. Personal bankruptcies rose by 57% in 2005, and over 10,000 people lost their homes, unable to keep up with mortgage payments. Many more are hopelessly in debt: total household debts, i.e. mortgages plus unsecured debts (credit cards, bank loans, overdrafts and hire purchase) have risen to well over £1 trillion.

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# Trade Unions and the Class Struggle

According to the INDEPENDENT (7 December 2005), the trade unions have been told to "*reform*" or "*lose Labour Party links*". This missive is from David Coats, a former TUC economics chief who was head of economic affairs from 1999 to 2004. He goes on to say in his Fabian pamphlet, RAISING LAZARUS - THE FUTURE OF ORGANISED LABOUR, that union leaders put off potential members because of the "*rhetoric of struggle, strikes and strife which has little appeal to employees who care more about 'getting on' than 'getting even'*".

Mr Coats claims that the adversarial approach reinforces the view that "*unions are stuck in the past, fighting battles in a class war that has little relevance to most people today*". *He concludes that the unions should adapt "to the modern workplace".* With an eye to a Labour safe seat, he calls for unions to form a "*progressive consensus*" with the government, for a dialogue on such issues as discrimination.

The trade unions only have themselves to blame for employing poachers turned gamekeepers. Mr Coats will not be the first union employee to forge a career in Labour Party politics, and he will not be the last. Why do trade unions need economists with crazy ideas about capitalism?

Trade unions would offer a far better service to their members by giving out copies of Marx's Wages, Price and Profit. Here is some good advice by Marx:

*The will of the capitalist is certainly to take as much as possible. What we have to do is not to talk about his will, but to inquire into his power, the limits of that power, and the character of those limits* (I, Production and Wages).

Know your enemy! Trade unions still believe the Labour Party is an ally. The Labour Party can only ever exist to support capitalism and, when in power, administer capitalism.

"*Progressive consensus*" is nothing more than class capitulation; it is to agree to deference, subservience and servility. There can never be consensus in the class struggle. You either have class exploitation or you do not. You either have private property ownership or not. You either have the wages system or not. There is no middle ground. There is no 'third way'. And there is no resolution of diverse class interests around the extraction of surplus value.

Trade unions should also learn about capitalism, class, class interest, and the profit motive which forces the capitalists to exploit. All this has been described by Marx, in a study of capitalism totally absent from the publications of economists like Mr Coats.

Marx usefully places profit and wages within the class struggle.

*But as to profits, there exists no law which determines their minimum... the limits of the working day being given, the maximum of profit corresponds to the physical minimum of wages; and that wages being given, the maximum of profit corresponds to such a prolongation of the working day as is compatible with the physical forces of the labourer. The maximum of profit is, therefore, limited by the physical minimum of wages and the physical maximum of the working day. It is evident that between the two limits of this maximum rate of profit an immense scale of variations is possible. The fixation of its actual degree is only settled by the continuous struggle between capital and labour, the capitalist*

constantly tending to reduce wages to their physical minimum, and to extend the working day to its physical maximum, while the working man constantly presses in the opposite direction. The matter resolves itself into a question of the respective powers of the combatants.

#### ibid., XIV: THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN CAPITAL AND LABOUR AND ITS RESULTS

Is this the economic advice Mr Coats gave to the trade unions? We do not think so. He would not have worked within Marx's critique of political economy, calling on the trade unions to give up their conservative motto of "*a fair day's pay for a fair day's work*" and to work instead "*to abolish the wages system*". Mr Coats would have kept quiet about class exploitation and the reasons for class conflict. He would not have told trade unionists that it was they, the working class, who produced all the social wealth. He would have kept stum about how class exploitation takes place and the usefulness of Marx's Labour Theory of Value in showing why the class struggle occurs. And he would have said nothing about the very limited role trade unions can have in a society where private ownership of the means of production prevails, and the profit motive is everything.

And what of the modern workplace? It is a site of class exploitation where workers produce more wealth than they receive in wages and salaries. It is a place where employers try to increase the extent and intensity of exploitation. That is why trade unions came into being - not that Mr Coats cares. What economics did Mr Coats study which portrayed the workplace as an area of mutual benefit, cooperation and enjoyment between capital and labour? Which modern workplace did Mr Coats visit? Not the ones that millions of workers find themselves forced to work in. Not the ones which sack workers and make the remaining ones work harder for less pay.

As for the links between the trade unions and the Labour Party, these should be broken as quickly as possible. The Labour Party was, is and always will be an anti-working class, pro-capitalist political party. When it is in government, this means administering the profit system and has to mean a clash with the working class, whether they are in trade unions or not.

Rather than reform themselves, trade unions should recognise that the Labour party is not different from the Tory Party or LibDems and other parties. They all exist to serve the class interests of employers. Any half-decent advice to trade unions would be to stay away from the Labour Party.

Why do unions have to be confrontational and forced to take part in the class struggle? Because economically that is the trade unions' reason for existence. It is not about discrimination as such - although trade unions should treat all their members the same - but about resisting employers who try to intensify and extend the rate of exploitation. Governments would love the trade unions to become a financial service or a mere social club, anything but being a response to the class struggle which means workers standing up to employers, periodically voting to go on strike, and getting a little more than if they meekly bowed their heads and kept quiet..

Note that Mr Coats says nothing about the employers and their organisations, like the Institute of Directors and the CBI. What about the anti-trade union legislation? The class struggle is a two-way process. We wonder where he dines these days. Who buys his services? Intellectual prostitution it is called.

So what about the future of organised labour? The class struggle engaged in by trade unions is fighting with effects but not with the causes of those effects. The working class are always at a disadvantage, not only because the means of production are owned by the capitalist class as private property but also because the capitalists' class privilege and wealth is protected by the machinery of government.

While trade unions struggle for higher wages and better working conditions, capitalism remains. The class struggle can only be abolished politically, by getting rid of the private ownership of the means of production. Marx had this to say:

*All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority.*

#### COMMUNIST MANIFESTO

The future lies with the working class organising consciously and politically into a principled Socialist party, with socialism as its only object. The class struggle is in effect a political struggle. It is the formation of a socialist

majority, the sending of socialist delegates to parliament, and the transformation of production for profit to production for social use. This is not the role of the trade unions but it is that of a Socialist party. For Marx, the pinnacle of the class struggle was for the working class to establish a political party. In this country, that political party is The SPGB.

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## Interest Rates

In the business section of newspapers, periodically articles appear dealing with the question of high and low interest rates. One of the most popular theories is for either the Government or the Bank of England to keep interest rates low. This was the view of Lord Dalton, a Labour Government Chancellor of the Exchequer in the post war Attlee government, who believed that it was a simple matter for a government to keep interest levels low.

Marx, long ago, described the factors which immediately determine the rate of interest. He wrote (CAPITAL VOL. 3, chapter 22 Rate of Interest):

*... the relation between the supply of loanable capital on one side, and the demand for it on the other, decide at any time the market level of interest.*

Marx described how capitalist profit derives from the unpaid labour of the working class and how, if the capitalist is using borrowed funds, he has to pay away part of the profit in the form of interest, the amount depending on the prevailing interest rates.

*If we observe the cycles of variation, in which modern industry moves along - condition of rest, increasing activity, prosperity, overproduction, crisis, stagnation, condition of rest, etc.,... - we shall find, that a low rate of interest generally corresponds to periods of prosperity, or of extra profit, a rise of interest to the transition between prosperity and its reverse, and a maximum of interest up to a point of extreme usury to the period of crises...*

*It may happen, however, that low interest is found in times of stagnation, and moderately rising interest in times of increasing activity. The rate of interest reaches its highest point during crises, when money must be borrowed to meet payments at any cost (ibid.).*

Particular interest rates vary according to the class of security and the length of time for which the money is borrowed but the average rate of interest, like the average rate of profit, shows long periods of stability, apart from the ups and downs referred to above.

*The average rate of interest appears in every country for long epochs as a constant magnitude, because the general rate of profit - in spite of the continual variation of the particular rates of profit, in which a variation in one sphere is offset by an opposite variation in another sphere - varies only in long intervals (ibid.).*

In our day, there is a continual argument between those economists who expect the average rate of interest to rise and those who expect it to fall. But it follows, from the way in which interest rates are determined, that neither the government nor a central bank can determine those interest rates simply by exhortation or by monetary manipulation, but would have to control all the economic factors which combine to affect the supply of loanable funds.

Before the Second World War, some economists believed that interest rates would keep falling until they approached zero. Only Japan, in recent years, through its long economic stagnation, had interest-rate levels approaching zero.

The theory of zero interest rates was associated with Silvio Gesell, particularly his scheme of 'free money', which he claimed would do away with interest repayments. But the will o' the wisp of very low or zero interest rates on loans was much older than Gesell, whose works were first translated into English in 1929, the year before his death. Gesell had been influenced by Proudhon, and Proudhon had been preceded by John Gray, both writing in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Gesell proposed that money should be issued in a form which depreciated with every week from the date of issue, his suggestion being that each note should lose one-tenth of one per cent of its face-value each week. This, he thought, would deter people from holding onto money, they would want to get rid of it quickly, and this would keep the level of investment up and the rate of interest down, and would also obviate depressions.

The basic economic fallacies of Proudhon and Gray were examined by Marx in his CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY AND CAPITAL (Vol. 3, chapter XXI). Both Proudhon and Gray wanted capitalism but not the features which inescapably belong to it. They wanted products to be bought and sold, but not to conform to the economic laws of commodity production. Products were to have their prices determined directly by a National Bank which would issue certificates as to the amount of labour required to produce them. Those certificates were then to circulate as money, and so no one would need to pay high interest rates for loans, or indeed any interest at all.

Gesell's particular scheme has not caught on although Keynes, who combined a low opinion of Marx with a high opinion of Gesell, expressed the view that "*the future will learn more from the spirit of Gesell than that of Marx*" (GENERAL THEORY OF UNEMPLOYMENT, Macmillan, 1961, p355). Ironically, Gesell has no entry in PENGUIN DICTIONARY OF ECONOMICS (2003) while Marx has two pages devoted to his theories. But we have had quite a good test of the Gesell theory, even if not in the form he proposed.

For most of the decades after 1940, money in this country was more or less steadily depreciating but, far from interest rates falling to zero, Bank rate has been up to a peak of over 20 per cent. In part, this was in response to the high rate of inflation, and subsequently, with inflation rather lower, the Bank of England interest rate has stayed around or below 5 per cent for several years. But, in the real world, those workers who need to borrow, whether for housing (mortgages) or for day-to-day living expenses (e.g. credit cards, overdrafts and loan sharks), find the interest rates charged are considerably higher.

Likewise, businesses who borrow also find that banks and other lenders are likely to charge them at various rates, usually well above that of the Bank of England. As Marx noted, the interest rate charged by banks and other lenders is a reflection of the demand for credit: like other prices, it falls as demand falls in relation to supply, and *vice versa*.

Whether the Chancellor or the Governor of the Bank of England believe their policies do control interest rates and the economy is irrelevant. Both have been taught by successive generations of economists that capitalism can be managed by bankers or by politicians. No banker or politician could ever state that commodity production and exchange for profit is anarchic and unpredictable, and will move from periods of boom to crisis to stagnation.

Yet the failed economic theories, the failed economic policies and the failed governments - all indicate that Marx's analysis of capitalism, as described in CAPITAL, is still valid and sound, demonstrating as it does that you cannot have capitalism without its inherent consequences.

#### PUTIN AND PRESCOTT, POWER AND PRIVILEGE

Mr Putin, the Russian tsar, loves skiing. His plans to develop a mountain resort, near to the Black Sea port of Sochi, into a place the Russian 'super-rich' elite can enjoy skiing and other winter sports in suitable luxury (INDEPENDENT, 4 February 2006) will cost the Russian government, of which Putin is the Godfather, more than five times what it plans to spend on healthcare and over ten times what it plans to spend on education this year. As the bible says, *to them that have shall be given...*

Mr Prescott, our own Deputy Prime Minister 'forgot' to pay his council tax and failed to pay it for several years. When Westminster Council finally cottoned on, he owed them all of £3,830. For the rest of us, however, being just a bit late, we risk being jailed. As one of Joe Public noted pointedly:

"Deputy P M John Prescott will undoubtedly get away with "forgetting" £3,830 in council taxes. In 2005 a 73-year-old Exeter lady was jailed for £53 arrears. And I have come across a newspaper report dated 10 July 1998, revealing that a 71-year-old Doncaster lady with failing memory, who needed a zimmer to get about, was sentenced to 90 days for £600. Proud of yourselves, Blair and Brown?" (BBC CEEFAX, 17 January 2006)

Sad to say, many workers are shocked at the fact that politicians make laws for us to comply with, or that, to put it bluntly, prisons are built primarily to punish the poor.

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## ***Socialism - A Dictionary Is Almost Right***

Language is constantly changing, and no more so than in the meanings we give to words. Dictionaries tend to reflect

changing usage, and so 'communism' and 'socialism' have been notoriously difficult words to define.

For instance, there was the Labour Party's evasive and ambiguous "*commitment to socialism*" in its 1918 Clause Four: *To secure for the producers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry, and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible, upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry and service.*

This was quoted in THE LABOUR PARTY - A MARXIST HISTORY by Tony Cliff and Donny Gluckstein: see chapter 3, WAR AND RECONSTRUCTION - LABOUR ADOPTS SOCIALISM [sic]. These writers described that 1918 Clause Four as marking "*the conversion of the Labour Party into a 'socialist' organisation, or, to be more exact, a mass reformist party...*" (p72).

They were apparently unable to see that their description of the Labour Party as a *reformist* party contradicted their claim that this was "*a 'socialist' organisation*". Yet these men were prominent, one could say leading, members of the so-called Socialist Workers Party. How odd that they, claiming to write "A MARXIST HISTORY", clearly could not see the very real and obvious differences between a Socialist party and a reformist one. To them, it seems the word 'socialist' was empty of meaning: it could be applied to a reformist party just as well as it could to one with revolutionary aims.

Adding to the confusion produced by the Labour Party and its supporters, ignorantly describing as 'Socialist' their various reform policies, there was even more confusion brought about by the Russian Revolution and the fellow-travellers of the 'Communist' Party. These claimed that 'Socialism' had actually been established in 'Soviet' Russia, and redefined 'Socialism' and 'Communism' to mean what Lenin and his followers decreed.

'Socialism' came to be seen as a halfway house between capitalism and communism, with *state ownership* of the means of production (in Britain, Labour adopted this as a policy of nationalisation, also referred to as 'public ownership'), while in 'communism' there would be common ownership, one day.

Throughout the 20th century, lexicographers struggled with these problematic terms. For instance, the CONCISE OXFORD DICTIONARY (1940) gave this definition of 'socialism' as meaning something close to a totalitarian dictatorship:

*Principle that individual freedom should be completely subordinated to interests of community... national ownership of land & capital, state distribution of produce...*

'Communism' however came off rather better, as a vaguely utopian notion:

*Vesting of property in the community, each member working according to his capacity and receiving according to his wants.*

A later, cheaper, dictionary (The Award Compact Dictionary, 1984) was wild and woolly about 'socialism', and gave 'communism' the Moscow treatment:

*A political doctrine which aims at the overthrow of capitalism and the vesting of all authority and property in the state.*

Some more recent dictionary definitions seem to be returning to the older meanings of these words, providing definitions which even a Socialist may find acceptable. In a recent edition of The Chambers Dictionary (2003), we found these definitions:

\* communism: *a social theory according to which society should be classless, private property should be abolished, and land, factories, etc collectively owned and controlled.*

Apart from omitting any reference to democratic control (possibly implied), this definition has escaped from the 20th century Labour and Moscow confusions, and so is a step forward. Also, it counters the endless references to the supposed "*collapse of communism*" lies churned out by the BBC and other mass media.

However, Chambers also gives a secondary usage for 'communism' as "*a system of government adhering to these principles*". Nonsense: in communism, a classless society, there would no longer be a state, and hence no "*system of government*". Worse, a third (incomprehensible) usage offered described 'communism' as "*Marxian socialism as*

*understood in Russia".* But the fact that this was only the third, and not the primary or even secondary definition given, indicates that current usage has clearly changed, making our task somewhat easier in the future.

\* socialism: *the theory, principle, or scheme of social organisation which places the means of production of wealth and the distribution of that wealth in the hands of the community.*

Not bad but this definition in CHAMBERS still lacks what The SPGB's 1904 definition of Socialism included. Together with "*the common ownership of the means of producing and distributing wealth*", Socialism will mean the "*democratic control [of these]... by and in the interest of the whole community*". Socialism is democratic or it is not Socialism.

We hope the next edition of this dictionary will catch up with our 1904 definition, published in all our Party's leaflets and pamphlets, and in every issue of our journal, The SPGB, and proclaimed by every Party speaker.

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## Q & A - About Socialist MPs

### SOME SOCIALISTS IN PARLIAMENT - BUT THEN WHAT?

I have been considering applying for membership again. However before I do so I have a question, and I was wondering if you could help.

Say The SPGB had won the 2005 election. We would then have a socialist government; however, because we were the only country in the world with a socialist government, we would be unable to do anything about it. I understand that a global majority would have to be in favour of socialism for it to work. However, due to regional differences, this isn't likely to happen at the same time. For example, in many countries, people don't even have access to a socialist party.

The change from a feudal society to a capitalist society took hundreds of years to happen in every country in the world. Even with modern communication, it would take many years for the whole world to come round to the same way of thinking.

Therefore, if The SPGB won the election, what would they do while waiting for the rest of the world to change? I hope you can help me answer this question as I would not like to join the party until I understand its ideas fully.

### OUR REPLY

To some extent this is a hypothetical question since at present we are unfortunately nowhere near being in a position to get even one candidate elected, let alone a majority of MPs. And the reason is simple: only a tiny minority of people - in this country or elsewhere - support Socialism, whilst the vast majority think that elections are about questions like taxes, the funding of the NHS, etc., so they vote on the basis of what reforms parties offer, and what promises they make about the future smooth running of the system.

If you think about the question you put, I hope you will see that it is improbable in the extreme to suppose that in Britain, but not, say, in France or Germany, there would be a majority of Socialists whilst, in the rest of the world, Socialist ideas were still being rejected out of hand. Socialist consciousness is not likely to develop only in a few 'islands' of enlightenment (even if it will develop quicker in some places than others).

That is especially the case today with the internet and other modern means of communication, which make it almost impossible for governments to impose restrictions on workers' ability to communicate with one another, across the globe. That is one reason why your analogy with the change from feudal society to capitalism is inappropriate.

It was even inappropriate at the time (1847) when Marx and Engels wrote in THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO of the fast-developing trend to a world market which would break down all Chinese walls, and called on the *,workers of all countries* to unite.

Incidentally, whilst capitalism developed over a period of time in Britain and some European countries, later the speed of capitalism's development in other countries was much faster, again due to the effect of the world market.

One other point: The SPGB accepts that there may be some states which would not go over to Socialism at the same time. What we need is that the advanced, developed countries - the ones with most influence in the world economy - should make that change. If there is a sufficient number (not necessarily 100%) of countries able to do this, the others will either follow suit or stagnate, until one day they decide to go with the new system.

The way the world economy works now means that no country, however large, is self-sufficient - all countries need to buy from other countries. This interdependence of economies means also constant interchange of workers and managers, scientists and researchers, worldwide. As John Donne wrote, "*no man is an Island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main.*"

Also, if there was a minority group who still wanted to stick with capitalism, buying and selling, employing and being employed, while the rest of the country or the world had gone over to Socialism and production for use, not profit, provided they kept themselves to themselves with these weird customs, they could perhaps set up a little commune on some island and just carry on, until they came to see sense. It would only be a problem if they tried to force their 'way of life' on the rest of us.

Of course, if there was a group of Socialist MPs in Parliament and similar institutions in other countries, with enough Socialist support to get themselves elected but not yet in a position to bring about the measures needed to end the class system and so help establish Socialism, they would be in a wonderful position to get the case for Socialism put, via the media, thus increasing the numbers of those workers who see Socialism as the only way forward, both in Britain and internationally.

#### REFORMS JUST DON'T WORK

Governments are forever called on to legislate to sort out the various inequalities and unfairnesses of capitalism but they never solve these problems. One example is the Sex Discrimination Act (1975). 30 years on, the statistics show how little has changed. The gender pay gap persists: in full-time work: men earn 17% more than women (cf. 29% in 1975). It is worse for part-timers where the pay gap has hardly changed at all: 38% now, cf. 42% then (GUARDIAN, 14 January 2006).

Moral: Socialists oppose wasting time chasing after umpteen ways of improving / reforming capitalism: this system is due for the scrap heap!

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## Some Last Thoughts On Socialism

The Prime Minister likes to think he is a Socialist working for the good of everyone. But if you take a good look at what he actually does against what he says he will do, then he certainly is not a Socialist and his actions only benefit a few.

There is also the political view that equal pay will help women: but what benefits has the Sex Discrimination Act given to working class women? They still have to find a job, they have to balance getting a wage and raising a family. Reforms have never been able to free workers, no matter whether they are male or female, from the daily grind of capitalism. Others think that 'anti-capitalism' is the answer. But it's difficult to be against something but not tell someone what you actually stand for. 'Anti-capitalism' has no relevance to Socialism.

Besides the Labour Party, other political parties want "*radical reforms*" but it is always the working class who suffer when these reforms are enacted. Reforms are part and parcel of capitalism and have nothing to do with Socialism.

The heart of Socialism requires production for use, not profit. The whole of the community, world-wide, would decide the priorities, not the capitalists and their politicians. The working class and the social problems they face on a day-to-day basis will no longer exist. There will be no buying or selling, and no money.

Under capitalism, workers do not get their needs met. They turn to politicians but they cannot organise society to meet the needs of the working class. The unfulfilled needs people are searching for will not be found within

capitalism. People are not lazy but they are frustrated with the decisions made by politicians, and so become alienated and rebellious. They do not understand the revolutionary power of the vote, and become apathetic. Lack of understanding is the only barrier holding workers back from establishing Socialism.

When the whole of the community, acting in a truly democratic way, vote to remove the present anarchistic set up, Socialism will be achieved. We can establish Socialism. Many workers in many countries are looking for the answer to their problems. It will require commitment, principle and hard work to make Socialism possible but the working class will not regret this action.

Trying to sum up, Socialism is no brief matter to discuss. The SPGB can discuss in greater detail, the case for Socialism and clarify many aspects of the problems facing the working class.

[This article was written in early November 2005 by Comrade Joyce Knight, a month before she died.]

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## News From India

Our comrades in the World Socialist Party (India) deserve our warm congratulations on the launch of their journal in Bengali. The first issue of this new journal, WORLD SOCIALIST, was published early this year.

In this first issue, there are articles in Bengali on:

*Is This Civilization? [editorial]*

*Why Socialists are not Leftists*

*Marxian usage of 'class', 'exploitation', 'capital', etc.*

*Communism or Socialism?*

*The BBC and Francis Wheen on Marx*

*Capitalism Fails the Working Class* [a The SPGB leaflet]

It is hoped that this publication will reach a number of readers, in West Bengal, Bangladesh and elsewhere, and so help our WSP(I) comrades in their determined efforts to put the case for Socialism.

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## Obituary: Joyce Knight

Comrade Knight was a committed Socialist tirelessly working to establish a world without class exploitation, national conflict, unemployment and other problems associated with capitalism. Joyce worked hard throughout her adult life in The SPGB with her comrades for the abolition of class privilege and power, and for the establishment of the common ownership and democratic control of the earth's resources for the benefit of everyone.

As a Socialist, Joyce looked forward to a world where production would be for social use and not for the profit of a minority. These were the Socialist ideas which Joyce adhered to. And, as an active Socialist, Joyce did whatever she could to help the spread of Socialist ideas: she regularly attended Branch meetings, distributed the Party's journal, The SPGB, attended lectures and debates, and typed up articles and pamphlets for publication, often long into the night despite her illness.

Joyce wrote regularly to the newspapers and, just before she died, Joyce sent us an article for the Party's journal (see p42). This article was written in hospital by a courageous and brave socialist who will be missed by her comrades and friends, both in and outside of The SPGB. We extend our sympathy to her children and family.

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# **Object and Declaration of Principles**

## **Object**

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

## **Declaration of Principles**

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN HOLDS:

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (ie land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.
2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle, between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.
3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind without distinction of race or sex.
5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.
6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organise consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.
7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.
8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

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